

~Other Speakers G-L: Aaron Hills:

The phrase "A Godless Christianity" sounds like a meaningless contradiction; an absurdity of speech. But let us not be too sure that it is meaningless. I am moved to write this by General Booth's graphic description of the dangers confronting the twentieth century: "I am of the opinion that the dangers which confront the coming century will be religion without the Holy Ghost; Christianity without Christ; forgiveness without repentance; salvation without regeneration; politics without God; and heaven without hell."

The words are startling in the extreme. But, alas! there is enough in current phases of the popular religion to make them no idle picture of an imaginary alarm. For instance,

1. Have we no "politics without God"? The great Gladstone said, "As I think of the political sins of England I tremble when I remember that God is just." When we see our own land, and the other of Christendom licensing the infamy of the liquor traffic, and our cities licensing brothels and tolerating gambling hells, and the great political parties down on their knees before the oligarchy of rum, can we believe that old General Booth was so very far out of the way? One of our most brilliant United States senators a few years ago declared that "morality in politics is an iridescent dream!" If such an atrocious sentiment should ever prevail in this country and pass unrebuked, and become the law of political action, then "politics without God" will no longer be a dreaded specter but a baneful reality. But,

2. Are none talking of or expecting forgiveness without repentance? Who can doubt it as he contemplates the low living, the moral obliquities, and measureless worldliness of people professing godliness? What mean the vicious habits, the cherished animosities, the low tastes, the loud and profane speech, the Sabbath desecration, the awful irreverence and financial crookedness of multitudes of church members? Each one of them thinks himself pardoned, and expects to be saved. Why the abounding hatred of the doctrine of holiness, as a possible experience if sin is not still loved and willingly cherished in the heart?

Nothing is more certain than that this is not God's picture of repentance. He says "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." Shame and self-loathing and abhorrence of iniquity, coupled with a self-abasing confession and forsaking of sin, are the characteristic of that repentance which God is pleased to honor and reward with forgiveness. But the advocates of the doctrine of necessary and continuous sin either fall far short of any such experience or their doctrines belie their hearts. Such a doctrine, universally believed, would land the Church in universal godlessness.

3. Who has not heard of salvation without regeneration? A fashionable minister of a fashionable church some time ago blandly informed his delighted auditors that conversion and regeneration were no longer needed as they once were; our dear people are now so cultured in Sabbath schools and high schools and colleges that the violent experience of a new birth is quite unnecessary; a little catechetical instruction and church joining are quite sufficient. The preachers who have joined the godless lodges, and sported with the world until they have lost all spiritual power to lead people to God, are very prone to adopt this theory. It a nice robe to cover their barrenness, such a beautiful whitewash for their sepulcher of rottenness! They can now flood their churches with multitudes of unconverted worldlings, and boast of church joiners, and offer incense to their statistics, and pass on to a higher appointment and a larger salary, and cover their shame. Meantime the poor, deceived, deluded church members are populating hell! If this becomes universal it will mean a church swallowed up in the maelstrom of godlessness.

4. Christianity without Christ -- we shall have it as an awful reality when our preachers all do as some of them already do, get their themes from the daily papers instead of from Word, and preach about everything else but Jesus, the only Hope of sin-cursed men. I was once holding a revival meeting in Michigan. The international Sabbath lessons at the time were in the Gospel of John. There was a popular minister in the neighborhood who was teaching a large Bible class of young men in his Sabbath school. He had not, as I was informed, taken a lesson from the Bible in six months; and the particular Sunday that the Sabbath schools in America were studying the wonderful intercessory prayer of Christ in the upper chamber, this popular preacher was talking to his class about Portugal! I once attended the Sunday evening service of a prominent preacher of Boston. His theme for the evening was "The Gospel of Greece." He announced for his next Sabbath evening the "The Gospel of Montenegro!" What is needed today is men who will preach the GOSPEL OF CHRIST, "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

5. Heaven without hell. Preachers are now becoming too refined to offend the sensitive tastes of their cultured parishioners by any mention of the realms of the lost. The word hell is too gross for their gracious lips to frame.

The very idea of it is banished from thoughts, along with the ghosts and spooks that tormented our superstitious and benighted ancestors, things which enlightened people of our day have happily outgrown.

I once heard a prominent preacher in Hartford, Connecticut, say that "if anybody feared God it was because he did not know Him. A famous preacher in Boston declared, "There is nothing in God to fear."

This awful delusion of no hell is sweeping over the willing ears of our luxurious, easygoing age. How blindly such preachers read history! What! the God of the hurricane, and cyclone, and pestilence, and thunderbolt; and of Sodom and Gormorrah, and of the Canaanites, and of ancient Jerusalem; the God of the wrecked civilizations and lost empires! -- nothing in Him to fear! The writer of the Epistle

to the Hebrews evidently thought otherwise, and wrote "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and Godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire."

I was once on a train on my way to Cincinnati to lead a revival meeting. Right behind me were three men: a drummer for a wholesale liquor house, a man who confessed that he had won all the clothes he had on in a bet, and a man who boasted how he was constantly cheating the railroads in a matter of freight -- in other words, a liquor man, a gambler, and a thief. After a time their when one of them said with a bland smile, "There isn't any hell. Beecher has filled it up." And so it is liquor men, thieves, gamblers, debauchees, the profane, the vile, the worldly, the sensual, the devilish, and the fallen preachers -- all are happy to believe that there is no peril in sin, and nothing in God to fear.

This belief, were it universal, would make of modern society another Sodom.

6. But lastly, and to my mind the worst of all, and the root from which all the other errors spring, is religion without the Holy Ghost. This takes out of our modern church life all change of heart, all regeneration, all witness of the Spirit, all sanctification -- in short, all the supernatural; and substitutes poor human for the divine. Are we in no dangers from this type of religion getting among us? What mean the covert and even open sneers at revival and conversions and the baptism with the Holy Ghost? How is it that churches are depending wholly upon the culture and oratorical skill and presence and social standing of their preachers, and with in their turn, are teaching the people to ignore the Holy Ghost. Witness the following: I supplied the pulpit of a large church in Massachusetts some years ago. At the close of the sermon, an aged minister said to me: "It seemed good to hear the old gospel once more; our last pastor, in seventy-three sermons and prayers, made no reference to the Holy Spirit!"

Two or three years ago one of my students saw a preacher peer under the pews and say contemptuously: "Where is that thing that you call the Holy Ghost? You wouldn't know Him from an old sow if should see Him!"

Another of my students heard a preacher say in his prayers: "O Lord God, Thou knowest that we know there is no such thing as the Holy Ghost." Another of my pupils saw a little time ago in Oklahoma a preacher go about the church before his audience, waving his hat in the air and crying blasphemously: "If there is any Holy Ghost in the house we want to get Him out!"

If this kind of conduct is not akin to the sin of blasphemy that hath never forgiveness what could be? And it is driving God from our sanctuary services, clothing the churches and sending multitudes to hell. This religion without the Holy Ghost.

A prominent official of a great church, in an address before a great convention, took the position that children did not need conversion -- merely training up in the right way. He made religion to be an evolution and education. He discounted religious experience, and by assertion and illustration made religion to consist merely in taking hold and performing Christian work. If ever this kind of teaching takes possession of the Church and goes to seed, we shall have a godless Christianity, a civilization lost, a church damned.

Let holiness people draw near together and stand firmer than ever for an inspired Word, a genuine repentance, a regeneration begotten of the Spirit, the sanctification by the Holy Ghost, God ruling the nations, righteousness the law of life, and Christ all in all.

The billows of unbelief and sin may be rising; but ours is the cause of truth, and our movement inspired by the Holy Spirit is the hope of the world.